

# PREPARING FOR PANDEMIC FLU

## *What You Can Do*

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population, begins to cause serious illness, and then spreads easily person-to-person worldwide. The federal government, states, tribal organizations, communities and industry are taking steps to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic.

A pandemic is likely to be a prolonged and wide-spread outbreak that could require temporary changes how we operate in many areas of society, such as schools, businesses, churches, transportation and public services.

An informed and prepared public can take appropriate actions to decrease their risk during a pandemic.

## *Communities, Businesses and Individuals Should:*

- Develop preparedness plans as you would for other public health emergencies.
- Participate and promote public health efforts in your state and community.
- Implement prevention and control actions recommended by your public health officials and providers.
- Adopt business/school practices that encourage sick employees/students to stay home.
- Anticipate how to function with a significant portion of the workforce/school population absent due to illness or caring for ill family members.
- Practice good health habits, including eating a balanced diet, exercising daily, and getting sufficient rest and take these common-sense steps to stop the spread of germs:
  - ▶ Wash hands frequently with soap and water or waterless hand cleaner.
  - ▶ Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues.
  - ▶ Stay away from others as much as possible if you are sick.
- Stay informed about pandemic influenza and be prepared to respond.
  - ▶ Consult [www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov) frequently for updates on state, national and international information on pandemic influenza.
  - ▶ Use national and local pandemic hotlines that will be established in the eventuality of a global influenza outbreak.
  - ▶ Listen to radio and television and read news stories about pandemic flu.



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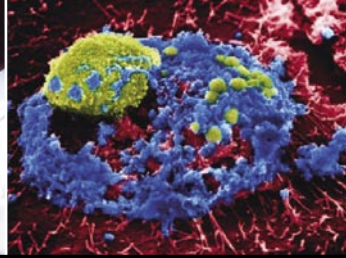


*"I am committed to the promotion and protection of the health of Alaskans, and I am committed to ensuring that we have a strong public health agency that is well prepared to rapidly detect and respond to outbreaks."*

*Governor Frank H. Murkowski*



# FLU, BIRD FLU and PANDEMIC FLU



# FLU, BIRD FLU and PANDEMIC FLU

- **Influenza** (Flu) viruses are a group of viruses that primarily infect birds, but also can infect and cause illness in mammals, including pigs, horses, and humans. Influenza has probably existed in mammals and birds since ancient times.
- **Flu epidemics** occur every year or two years when a flu virus undergoes a small genetic change, just enough that many people are susceptible to infection. Severe illness and death during annual influenza epidemics is most common among the elderly and persons with underlying medical conditions.
- **Flu pandemics** occur when there is a major change in the genetic make up of the virus. All humans are susceptible, attack rates are high, and mortality rates may be high as well. Influenza pandemics spread rapidly and can travel around the world in only a few months.
- **Bird flu** (avian influenza) is a contagious disease of birds but may occasionally cause disease in other animals, including humans. The current outbreak of the H5N1 bird flu virus is the most severe outbreak in poultry ever recorded and is unusual in the severity of illness which it causes in humans.

## *Bird flu risks to people*

- Bird flu infection to people from infected poultry is a rare event and usually results in mild disease, but the resulting disease from the current strain of H5N1 is severe. The virus causes a severe viral pneumonia and multi-organ failure.
- Symptoms of bird flu in humans have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms to pneumonia, and other severe and life-threatening complications.

## *Bird flu prevention and treatment*

- Studies suggest that the certain prescription medicines approved for human flu viruses would work in treatment of bird flu infection in humans. Currently there is no widely available vaccine to protect humans against the H5N1 bird flu virus that is being seen in Asia. However, vaccine development efforts are under way.
- The H5N1 bird flu virus is resistant to some antiviral medications commonly used for flu. However, two antiviral medications, oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir, are being used to treat flu caused by the H5N1 virus.

## *What has Alaska done to prepare?*

- Completed and posted the Alaska Pandemic Influenza Plan: <http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov/panfluplan.pdf>.
- Completed and updated the Alaska Strategic National Stockpile Plan. This Plan will be used to request and receive assets of the CDC Stockpile, including flu vaccine and antiviral drugs, and to distribute to hub communities.
- Completed four mass immunization clinics in 2004 and 2005. These exercises demonstrated that we can immunize 500-600 people an hour.
- Tested our ability to respond to a public health emergency during the 2005 Alaska Shield/Northern Edge statewide exercise.
- Passed new Public Health law in July 2005.
- Implemented the 2005-2006 seasonal influenza vaccine initiative.
- Completed the Emergency Public Information Plan.
- Distributed Alaska Division of Public Health and CDC advisories regarding flu immunizations, flu activity and avian flu to healthcare providers statewide.

## *What remains to be done?*

- Support community efforts to address pandemic influenza in local disaster plans to address pandemic influenza.
- Assure that rural Alaskans have access to medications, vaccine and health care.
- Develop an Alaska stockpile of Medical supplies including antiviral drugs.
- Update the Alaska Pandemic Influenza Plan to reflect new guidance in the U.S. DHHS Pandemic Influenza Plan (<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>).
- Expand public information and communication on avian and pandemic flu.
- Ensure that communication systems between federal, state, tribal and local agencies work during emergencies and disasters.
- Identify persons who should be prioritized for receiving limited supplies of antiviral drug and vaccines to prevent disruption of vital services and death.